

DATE: February 11, 2015
TO: Chairmen and Members of the Transportation Committee
FROM: Sandy Fry, 74 Westland Avenue, West Hartford, CT 06107
SUBJECT: Testimony in Support of Raised Bill No. 502, An Act Concerning Bicycle Safety and Transportation Options

This testimony is submitted in support of Raised Bill 502, An Act Concerning Bicycle Safety and Transportation Options. I offer my testimony as a professional engineer who has worked for over 15 years in the field of bicycle planning, as a certified bicycle safety instructor, and as a bicyclist who regularly commutes to work in downtown Hartford.

I commend the Transportation Committee for the work you have done to date in moving forward laws that improve safety for bicyclists. The 3 foot passing law and the Complete Streets law have made a significant difference. Now SB502 offers other needed improvements by clarifying statutory language, eliminating barriers to new bicycle facilities, and encouraging investments in new bike facilities.

There is a need for clarification in the statutes with respect to where bicyclists are to position themselves on the road and also how motor vehicles may pass slow moving vehicles, including bicycles.

Current state law says that bicyclists must ride as far to the right as practicable, however, the meaning of practicable is difficult to understand. The law goes on to offer exceptions to the far right as practicable requirement to help clarify the meaning. Then the question is – is this list all inclusive, are there other exceptions where a bicyclist may move out from the right edge of the road? I have found that different public safety departments and individual officers interpret this differently. Some believe that there are other exceptions, others believe the list is all inclusive. The Uniform Vehicle Code recommends that 2 additional exceptions – when a lane is too narrow for a bicyclist and motor vehicle to share side by side, and when the right lane is a right turn only lane – be included. Some states have removed the “far right as practicable” language and replaced it with “shall ride far enough to the right as judged safe by the bicyclist to facilitate the movement of overtaking vehicles unless other conditions make it unsafe to do so.”

Clarification is needed so that bicyclists, public safety officers, and motorists have the same understanding of the law. Additionally, in bicycle safety classes bicyclists are taught to be visible, to be predictable, and to ride to discourage unsafe actions on the part of other road users. Bicyclists are taught not to hug the right edge of the road, doing so makes them less visible and will encourage motorists to try to squeeze by them. I believe it is important for CT to either make its law consistent with the uniform vehicle code or to follow the lead of more progressive states and eliminate the “far right as practicable” language altogether.

Another area of the statute requiring clarification is related to passing slow moving vehicles. Currently the CT statutes do not address this topic. The 3 foot passing law has created a

dilemma for some drivers – do they need to ride behind a bicycle if there is a double yellow line, and only pass when a passing zone is indicated? A strict reading of the state statute regarding what the double yellow line means (Section 14-234, Determination of No Passing Zones) indicates that this is required. The double yellow line marking on highways is based upon estimates of required sight distance for a motor vehicle travelling at the speed limit to pass a motor vehicle travelling just under the speed limit. Sight distances required for passing slow moving vehicles are much shorter and in many cases, it is possible for a motorist to safely pass a slow moving vehicle, even where there is a double yellow line. Many states have laws that indicate that a driver may violate the prohibition of crossing a double yellow line. This change could be made simply by adding this language to Section 14-234 of the CT Statutes: “When passing a pedestrian, bicycle, tractor, or other slow moving vehicle, the operator of a vehicle may drive on the left side of the center of a roadway in a no-passing zone when such movement can be made in safety and without interfering with or endangering other traffic on the highway.”

The Complete Streets law has changed the ethic of many roadway designers and engineers. But they need help in implementing complete streets. The CTDOT Highway Design Manual has not been updated to include complete streets principles. This document serves as guidance for town, state, and consulting engineers. The sooner that it is updated, the sooner that we will be able to see complete streets proliferating in Connecticut.

There are other barriers to improving bike facilities in Connecticut. Currently, 2 way bike lanes (called “cycle tracks” by many) have been successfully deployed in New York City and many other locations in the country. But they are illegal in Connecticut. Our statutes need to change to allow their construction.

Finally, there is a continual need for investment in facilities for biking. The system of greenways is expanding, but there are many, many discontinuities and relying on federal funds alone will never get the full network built. Additionally, towns need to be challenged to try new things with road design. A well designed complete streets challenge grant program could get model improvements on the ground, leading more communities to consider these types of investments.

I love biking: to get to work, to run errands, to enjoy the beauty of Connecticut on the weekends. Whether you make any of the above mentioned changes, I will continue to ride my bike. But there are many others who are afraid to bike with conditions the way they are. The improvements that are proposed in SB502 will lead to more people enjoying bicycling and will make our state more attractive to residents and visitors alike. Bike investments have been shown to have a positive impact on the bottom line. Bike friendly communities lead to economic development and are very attractive to the millennial generation as they decide where to live and work.

Thank you for considering my thoughts on this bill.